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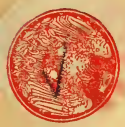

The Unseen House

By
Sylvester
Baxter

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Sylvester Baxter

THE UNSEEN HOUSE

THE UNSEEN HOUSE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

SYLVESTER BAXTER

BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1917

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword 7

The Unseen House 13

At the Public Bath 18

Blue Waters 24

Coals and Ashes: 1916 30

The Vortex 31

Dream—or Vision? 37

Father and Son 41

Friends at War 45

War Posters 49

Recruits 52

The Returning 60

Good-will and God's Peace 63

FOREWORD

AS TO POETRY AND FORM

When the poem begins to take shape in the poet's mind it seems to select its own form. If the form be deliberately selected in advance the effect must be that of the sophisticated, the self conscious. The circumstance that much of the work in this volume is written in free verse, the oldest of poetic forms, suggests a few words about form. Despite its ancient origin, free verse today is perhaps the most misrepresented, misunderstood, and to no little extent abused, of all forms.

Certain aspects of form, the more definite aspects, largely rest upon purely arbitrary considerations. Yet these non-essentials are the matters most in controversy. They are matters purely of arrangement, as of line-lengths, and even of the common distinction between verse and prose. To the blind, for instance, their appreciation of poetry depending upon hearing instead of sight, and equally to those who cannot read (as the public of the primitive poets, the bards and minstrels, could not read) it can make not the least difference whether the lines of a poem be long or short, or even whether the verse aspect vanish utterly, and the lines run on as in the psalms of David.

There is need of another word for the proper consideration of the contrasting aspects of poetry and prose. At present we are also obliged to oppose verse and prose, and the unfortunate consequence is that

poetry and verse are popularly confounded. Much prose is also poetry: imaginative prose, prose that embodies the poetic essentials of rhythm, cadence, and perhaps even rhyme. Such prose easily becomes verse, metrical and rhythmic. On the other hand verse faultless in rhythm, meter and rhyme may be hopelessly prosaic, without the slightest suggestion of poetry. But what we call poetic prose is true poetry.

Line-arrangement, or verse, whether regular or "free," finds its real service in guiding the eye and conveying a clearer perception of quality, a better sense of structure, while assisting vocalization. The line suggests a pause at the end, a pause that may be almost imperceptibly slight. This aspect of structure is widely disregarded in much of the free-verse arrangement of today, with effects of incoherence, of scrappiness. Free verse, in its rhythm, its cadence, its adjustment of line-lengths, demands an attention to technique as painstaking in its way as in the most highly finished regular forms. One has but to look at some of the manuscripts of Walt Whitman to appreciate how great was his devotion to technique.

In the free-verse forms contained in this volume the author has aimed to obtain the qualities of nature-cadence suggested by such sounds as that of running water, the liquid notes of water dropping into a pool, the voices of the wind—sound-sequences in which, however irregular the impression, there appear to be certain definite rhythmic recurrences.

There is one conventional aspect of modern English verse which transgresses the rules of clear perception and does much to impede natural expression. That is the custom of beginning verse invariably with a capital. This tends to interrupt the continuity of thought demanded by the continuity of the sentence. The more logical Latin mind has adopted the sensible rule, exemplified in modern French and Spanish verse, of limiting the capital letters to the beginning of the sentence. And since free-verse particularly demands this continuity in expression, the reform has been adopted for the poems of that character contained in this volume.

The Unseen House was suggested by the extraordinary beauty of the new home for the Perkins Institution for the Blind on the banks of the Charles in Watertown and the circumstance that its beauty was not directly manifest to the sightless ones for whom it was built. The poem first appeared in the Boston Evening *Transcript*. *At the Public Bath,* written in 1889, was contributed to a special publication issued by the Boston Press Club. *Dream or Vision* and *Good Will and God's Peace* appeared in *Unity; Father and Son* in the *Westminster Gazette,* London; *Friends at War* in the *Evening Mail,* New York; *War-Posters* in the *Boston Herald; The Returning* in the *New York Sun; Coals and Ashes* in the *Christian Endeavor World.*

TO THE MEMORY OF
SAMUEL GRIDLEY HOWE

THE UNSEEN HOUSE

God builds a house for the soul of man,
But Man knows not he dwells therein.

A BLIND ONE SPEAKS:

How strange the things we often hear:
those words that must be full of sense,
The thoughts that others comprehend—
and yet they stand for things unknown,
For things *we* may not hope to know.
They tell of things called beautiful:
For us who cannot see, the term
depicts this well beloved place,
This pleasant terrace where we stand—
where summer breezes kiss our cheeks,
And where the genial sunshine falls
and bathes us with its friendliness.
Here spacious walks invite our steps;
a fine-grained marble balustrade
Protects the outer side; wide stairs
lead down unto the landing-place
Where boats await to bear us out
upon the river's tranquil tide.

All this means *beautiful.* And yet
to others this dear home of ours

Enriches with its attributes
the precious word with meanings strange
Far, far beyond our power to think.
For me 'tis like some lordly ship
With splendid cargo laden deep—
the better part of which remains
Intangible except to those
who're gifted with *that other sense.*

I think of words like "golden glow,"
like "sunlit towers," like "glittering gates."
I think of *gold,* its delicate
response unto my finger-tips;
Of burnished gold—or velvet-faced
as though with finest dust bestrewn;
Gold liquified and molten warm
for pouring over sunlit towers
And washing down (as water flows)
to wet with fire their glittering gates;
Of wine made full of dusty gold
for charging sunsets with their glow.
Can others *see* things in the way
I feel the sense of words like those?

A while ago two visitors
came hitherward and sat themselves
Upon this bench where now we are,
while I, unseen, lay in the sun
Hard by, behind that lilac-bush.

They were of those that have that sense
Which builds for them another world
outside the one that we do know.
I wonder what 'tis like! One said
unto his friend: "How strange it seems
That this palatial edifice
of generous and stately halls—
Its cloistered courts all graciously
designed to gratify the eye,
And so exalt the vision, like
an anthem hewn and carved in stone—
Should builded be to domicile
these sightless ones: a vast abode
Whose comforts make it home for them,
but whose high beauty in design
Is wasted for unseeing eyes,
just as the rose's perfumed breath
For one without a sense of smell,
or as a glorious symphony's
Melodious weavings fail to reach
the ears of those who cannot hear.
Of what avail for them is this
fair landscape as it spreads away
Before this ample terrace, while
the sparkling river flows and loops
Itself in gleaming curves across
the meadow-levels to explore
Mysterious distances until
it comes at last to where awaits

To welcome it with open arms
the boundless sea?
"What can they know
Of all this glorious excellence
of sightly objects that rejoice
The vision in a place where dwell
the visionless, where lifts itself
Majestically dominant,
its sunlight-gilded pinnacles
To heaven aspiring, yonder tower?
Where many sights delectable
Array themselves to constitute
so rare a show of beauteous things
That here they seem a mockery?
"And yet to weave these vivid threads
Of visibility throughout
the fabric of the daily lives
Of those for whom they naught can mean
is after all a blessed thing.
For in the message that it bears
to us who have the light to read
The inner meaning of the words
it bids us learn, there also lies
Another message, meant for them
that cannot read the words of it
But who, when of the wonders told
the lavish world displays for us—
(The undiscernible attributes
of marvellous things that fill the void

Of that dark sphere wherein they grope)
are thus drawn out beyond themselves,
Beyond the circumscribing bounds
that hedge them in; and so impelled
The endlessly expanding realms
of soul and spirit to explore
They strive to reach the glorious goal
where sightless ones at last shall see."

The strangers rose and went their way.
I wish I knew what all that meant;
What all they said may signify.
But truly may it not well be
That the finer grains of sense we have
must compensate for what we lack:
Equivalent to what their sight
may mean for them? And furthermore
May there not even be, beyond
their wondrous world where things are seen
A world of senses yet more keen,
where they who dwell therein enjoy
Transcendent pleasures, marvellous,
beyond compare with aught we know—
We, whether blind or blest with sight?

AT THE PUBLIC BATH

An Idyl of the Town

Here is the public bath that the city has made for the people;
here on the edge of the bay, a gravelly beach gently shelving,
and the southerly slope holds the sunshine
that heats the bare flats to make warm for the swimmers
the incoming tide.
Here the clear waters dance in the soft summer breeze,
beating their lively staccato on the float, on the platform and piling,
when the tide is high, and the wind sweeping freshly
across the wide reach of the bay and the level salt marshes—
subsiding again to a vitreous surface
that languidly creeps
with the ebb or the flow in a calm.
Here all through the summer this place is a province in Nature's benignant republic.
Close by is the town with its unceasing turmoil,
its fierce competitive warfare,
its pitiless crushing of bodies and souls in the mills of its traffic,
its festering evils
induced by the barbarous scramble for bread and for gold.

But here for the moment is toil left behind;
all care is forgotten,
pleasure prevails and peace rules the scene.

II.

Across the wide space of the bay,
where the yachts gaily float like bevies of sea-birds,
the aqueous tints end and a carpet of green is outspread
for the feet of the distant great hills,
majestic in mantles of purple.
Here is true democracy;
all are made free, are made equals and brothers.
And because of these terms
all manner of persons come hither,
obeying the enticing call of the summer sea—
and to heed that behest
means to yield all distinctions
and stand but a man among men.

III.

Here comes a young fellow: the son of a banker;
he leaves with the keeper his well filled purse and his costly gold watch,
hires a towel, takes a dressing-room key,
and doffs his fine garments in the neatly kept place.
In the adjacent compartment
a youthful mechanic undresses;
beyond, there's a stalwart young teamster
who hurriedly strips off his clothing;

and there also are clerks, day-laborers, and school-boys.
Outside on the platform swarm dozens of urchins
who shed in a twinkling their scanty attire;
they carelessly leave it wherever it chances to drop.

IV.

Returning their keys to the keeper,
who hands back a disc inscribed with the numbers
to wear round the neck on a cord of elastic,
all hasten alike to the water.

In rank or in wealth
no difference now exists for the eye.
The youthful mechanic, shapely and gracefully poised,
might pass for the brother of his fortune-favored neighbor,
who, trained to an athelete in the college gymnasium,
steps forth from his doorway
with face, neck and arms richly browned
by his yachting and boating throughout the long summer.
Down to the water they run side by side;
in friendliness they laugh
at the first cool touch of the lapping wave;
together they plunge for the joyous embrace
of the mother-element's welcoming arms;
and then as companions
they bravely strike out with lithe and supple motion.

V.

What lusty enjoyment on every hand!
Divers leap from the raft,
taking the water in rocket-like curves,
sheathing themselves in the liquid
as into its scabbard slides the blade of a sword.
Boys noisily splash,
churning the water to foam and ducking each other,
their merry shouts echoed back by the waves
that blend them in watery babble
to a part of the same nature-music.

VI.

Those lads and young men
who are running and plunging, swimming and floating,
standing there kissed by the sunshine,
their bodies all glistening with the wet of the waves
and healthily flushed by the gentle smite of the caressing water,
varying in delicate tints conveyed by inherited hues
from ancestral races—
some a warm olive, some a rich brown, beside the prevalent ivory tones—
all intermingling here in this land,
prophetic of vigorous American stock . . .
with all these hundreds here,

what looker-on might so discerning be
as unto each respective to assign
the station or rank they may hold among men
while thus they stand in frank equality—
as equal each to each they came into the world?

VII.

Yet there are distinctions
sharply marked in this or that misshapen feature,
or stunted growth, or pallid tinge from malnutrition:
profanements of the Master's handiwork
wrought by poverty's inflictions and direful stress
of toil.
Still—the day must surely dawn
when the curse of this blemish shall vanish—
as the tonic touch of air and sunshine
dispels a blight most foul.
Then men throughout life shall be equal and free,
each lending a hand to his brother,
as today, here and now, for a moment they stand—
prophetic the symbol they give us—
in the pure democracy of the bath.

VIII.

A curious desire arises:
a longing for the power
to strip our human kind of all extrinsic things
and let men stand together without discrimination—
princes with peasants,

with paupers the proud of purse,
the lackey erect beside the lord,
savage together with civilized man—
and then annihilate their bauble havings
as one might gather up these various garments here
and toss them all into the sea!

IX.

But even now the inner eye,
true-seeing, crystal-visioned,
may surely view humanity in this unerring way.
For all superfluous things from us must fall
when sooner or later we plunge
into the bath of Death
to emerge with naked souls
unabashed in Eternity's air.

Insistently my thoughts return to Mexico: those days of young manhood, days steeped in sunlight; feeding my soul with the beauty that blesses a land which was meant for mankind at its best—and marred now by man at his worst.

My memory is filled with manifold pictures. When I recall them the music of Spanish speech weaves itself throughout the scenes I knew: music as from brooks unseen in a woodland—rivulets of words in a golden flow, words whose very sounds convey the essence of their sense; sonorous words, meltingly rounded and melody bearing.

Again I look from the heights as in days long past. I stand at the tableland's verge and I see afar off—far—far...into the dimness of illimitable distances: vast valleys, whose level floors are lakes of hazy atmosphere, drowsing in warm tranquility.

Beneath in the vaporous depths extend the regal *haciendas*—sugar-cane all golden green, emerald rice-fields, thousands of acres of tender young wheat, intervals of yellow stubble left from the harvested flax, dark islands of glossy-leaved trees studded with buildings of dazzling white. As I look down upon them the wide cultivations are softened by glorified tintings into magnificent tapestry carpets; bathed in

palpitant, sun-shot air, they show like opalescent shallows among the palm-fringed islands of Carribean waters.

Huge land-waves roll off to meet wet billows down in the Gulf, or in Pacific waters, where at last the mountains submerge themselves—their stupendous undulations richly robed with tropical forests.

Unseen from the heights, sweet waters course through joyous valleys—unseen, except where venturesome streams make daring leaps in flashing whiteness down into chasms all brimming with shade. Again they hide in sheltering woods—but now in vain their concealment; rose-hued rivers of blossoming trees that grow on the banks of the streams wind like the crooked wake of a tacking ship through the sea of the forest and betray the ways of the waters below.

Profound allurements entice me; I yield and descend. And there I seek out the hiding waters; they are calling and calling in liquid Spanish, meltingly rounded and melody borne. I discover the lusty young rivers that have leaped from the hills, their banks of velvety verdure splendidly starred with butterfly orchids.

The waters are sweet—though they've taken their toll from the rocks to be paid to the sea. Their mineral burden heightens their buoyance, sustaining a swimmer like ocean water; in return it dyes them

a deep and luminous blue: the blue of Swiss lakes, the blue of a tropical sea.

That is *el agua azul*: the blue water, holy to Mexican gods—not the borrowed blueness, lent in sky reflections; ever constant is the color to the earth-imparted hue; it loyally holds its vividness beneath gray canopies of low-hung clouds that ride with the steadfast trade-wind—clouds driving inland from the ocean to drape the mountain-slopes with mist; blue through all the sylvan gloom of bosky tunnels where verdure-hung vaults are paved with a polished translucence; blue in silent river-reaches, motionless as mirrors of glass; blue as of turquoise veined with quartz, through murmuring intervals of swift unrest; blue in cavernous depths where daylight sifts down through festoonments of blossoming plant-growth—here strangely weird the cerulean hue when beneath the flash of flaring torches, the bodies of bathers, floating in gloom, show in luminous blue pallor, ghostlike through the water's blackness; blue that glances and merrily dances, sunny as Saxon eyes, when in eager escape from the cave the river dashes again into the open day and tumbles in jubilant bounds over the brinks of giant cliffs to fall in a filmy fabric of water and air, lightly wreathed with foaming lace as it veils rock-faces disguised with moss-covered masks.

So I and my comrades roam through the valleys where run the blue waters. We bathe in the rivers,

dive in the wonderful pools, swim in the caverns, and splash in nude sport where the rivers come tumbling down from the tableland heights. And there, while it falls, the water calls out the name that was made for its falling: *el salto del agua, el salto del agua,* I hear it incessantly calling.

Thus the voice of the waters come running together in flowing Castilian—meltingly rounded, melody bearing and melody borne—repeated again and again to fall from the tongue in liquid delight, weaving its words throughout my Mexican pictures until of themselves they dance into orderly sequence and tell what they say in a song:—

The Leap of the Water

Agua azul!—
And 't is azure-blue water,
The hue of the skies in the crystalline pool—
There are plumes of bamboo, there are marvellous margins
Of maiden hair lace-work above the swift *salto,*
El salto del agua—the leap of the water—
Azure-blue water,
Agua azul!

Agua azul!—
And 't is azure-blue water,
The hue of her eyes in the amethyst pool
Where the turbulent river makes merry commotion,

Boiling and foaming below the high *salto,*
El salto del agua—the leap of the water—
Azure-blue water,
Agua azul!

Agua azul!—
And 't is azure-blue water!
Young laughter resounds in the tropical pool
Where boys gaily plunging in frothy blue turmoil
Are showered with the tingling delight of the *salto,*
El salto del agua—the leap of the water—
Azure-blue water,
Agua azul!—

FRIENDS AT WAR

COALS AND ASHES: 1916

Adventuring in golden glory
(Half dreaming through an olden story,
Romance wrought from ancient ways)
I sit before my open fire
And hark me back to knightly days.

But while on glowing coals I gaze
New flames leap up—and in their glare
The crumbling logs show ashen there.
Then old-time romance fades away,
Its glowing fabric turning gray
Before the unrelenting blaze
That rages through these tragic days.

THE VORTEX

I.

Imponderable as thought,
the tenuous envelopment of spirit—
enfolding the world
and saturating it throughout,
endowing its every particle with the potency of life—
is real as the water is,
as actual as air.
Inconceivably sensitive,
a medium responding to slightest impulse
of will or thought
(as radiographic waves, intangible,
transmit intelligence
from world's end to world's end),
the mightiest of forces
are there eternally at work,
manipulating the moulds
wherein the forms of all vitality
are perpetually recast,
and unerringly directing human destinies.
These all prevailing potencies
may be aroused to action
by a single breath of human passion.
Hence it came to pass

that within that realm
which enwraps this world
there gathered together—
like vultures expectant of carrion—
the ominous forces of evil.
United by discord they sang:

The Moment!
The Moment we long have awaited!
It lieth at hand;
And now shall be sated
In every land
The will of our pleasure
Beyond any measure
The world has yet known.
From vast conflagrations
Consuming the nations
The glare that is cast
Shall disclose the dark throne
Of the Master of Sin
As in drapings of red
Bedrenched with the blood
That then shall be shed:
Torrents of blood
From myriads dead!

The Moment!
The Moment is Now!
Else were it too late;
For the nations were learning to know

That their peoples can only bestow
The best they may give
Unless by the Law they shall live
That gives of their best to each other—
Each man unto each as a brother.
Hence the March of the Race
Was approaching the place
Where the bounties of life—
Of life at its best—
Were its own at the close of the quest
That ends with the ending of strife!

II.

Everywhere
people were peacefully at work;
from a cloudless sky
The sun poured down its kindly light
and men looked up and smiled,
thankful for life
in a world so excellent.
Peasant lads in Belgium
were breeding carrier pigeons,
and buyers came to send them over seas:
thousands and thousands of the gentle birds.
Farmers were cultivating their fields
and harvesting their crops;
gardeners tilling their vineyards,
florists cherishing choice flowers—
sending potted azaleas

and rhododendrons
in splendid bloom to other lands.
Industry hummed in hundreds of shops and mills
and voices spoke in the whirring wheels:

For the weal of the world
we are lending a hand!

III.

A shot rang out—
and then another!
The victims were royal:
"*Pro patria,*" cried the youth, exulting.

From the pool of blood
a little cloud rose up,
and as the sunshine touched it
It grew dark and ominous.
Ascending, it spread
whirling, whirling . . .

IV.

In the sultry silence of a summer noon
the merest trifle—
an arrow's flight, a pebble cast—
may start a tiny whirlwind
that daintily toys at first with scraps of paper
and lightly sports a while with the highway dust
until, like a growing tiger's-whelp

that in one moment leaps
from milk-fed harmlessness
to quench a new-born thirst for blood,
it suddenly expands
into a fierce tornado
that cuts wide swaths of ruin
through a devasted landscape.
So fared the world from those pistol-shots
scarce heard above the gala tumult of the Moment.

V.

The cloud sped swiftly onward,
spreading from land to land
until its baleful canopy
quenched the cheerful sunlight
throughout the earth.
Evil words sounded out of the blackness,
hatred their burden.
Men listened eagerly and avidly obeyed.
From prospering, peaceful trades
men turned to the making of murderous things
and the thinking of murderous thoughts,
sowing broadcast the seeds of hopelessness
throughout the earth.

VI.

The vortex born of those fatal shots
has grown so vast
under its evil momentum

that even now it threatens
to overwhelm all nations
in a whirlwind of wrath.
The service-gifts of fire
and soul-illuminating speech
received by Man from above
first made him more than Beast,
endowing him with potencies divine—
or diabolical;
yet leaving him free choice as to the way
that he would have them do his bidding . . .
And whenever the crucial Moment came
how has he chosen?
Has ever before
the world been so dark as now?

Yet sooner or later the tempest must pass,
the sun must some time shine again.

DREAM—OR VISION?

That was a curious dream I had—
Or vision, some would say it was;
It matters little as to name,
It was so strange, it was so true:

A wondrous Being—glorious,
Divinely great, divinely wise!
I somehow in its presence stood.
There in the hollow of its hand
A globe was held; intent its gaze
Thereon was fixed, as one might look
Into a lustrous crystal sphere.
So perfect was the imagery
It seemed to be this very world,
Its continents and oceans all
Displayed within the envelope
Of a translucent atmosphere.

And as I looked on any part
There I could see a teeming life
Of infinite diversity,
With all its intimate concerns
In every detail manifest
As were I there—and part of it.

Whatever my attention claimed,
Therewith I was identified,
In perfect rapport with it all.

I saw an island paradise:
Each separate valley there enclosed
A tiny nation by itself,
Living its own life all apart,
And quite idyllic, natural.
Yet for the folk beyond the range
Each little people cherished naught
But hatred black, implacable.
"What folly!" said I to myself.
"They're neighbors all; why rob
And slay each other? Why . . . ?"

Again I saw a paradise:
An island, like the other one;
Indeed, it was the other one—
Yet all of its inhabitants
Were here one folk; and every vale,
Now richly tilled, united was
With neighboring valleys by smooth roads
Where motor-cars sped to and fro;
And telephones all houses joined
Both near and far; and everywhere
The people all were closely knit
In ties of trade and amity.
Then ever wider grew my gaze:

At first I saw the earth entire
With all its kingdoms manifold,
Involved in strife perpetual—
One vast extension, as it seemed,
Of that first island's savage state.

But gradually there came about
A steadfast betterment of things,
Until at last I saw the world
Approaching here, achieving there,
In many a land the well-wrought state
Whereby that second island realm
Had raised itself from savagery
To levels high, where happiness
And all well-being were the rule.

Yet while I gazed contentions rose
And parts fell back, and so a blight
Came over all—and sorrow fell,
And evil days returned again.
So happened it repeatedly—
And every effort to retain
The priceless blessings born of Peace
Seemed all in vain. So then I turned
And, sorrow-weighted, question made
Unto that Being Mystical:
"And must it ever be this way?
May not that second island realm
The model be for all the world—
Prophetic of the day to come?"

The Being smiled inscrutably:
"The model stands, by man achieved;
And man may easily attain
Throughout the world those self-same boons
Of lasting peace and happiness.
He only has to know the Right.
Yet it must ever be as now
So long as mankind heedeth not
The simplest lesson trade has taught
Since those first days when things were brought
From other lands unto those parts
Where men desired and needed them:
That commerce service means, not gain—
Except the gain that brings no loss.
That lays upon no man a cross;
The gain that never comes with greed.
And till this truth the nations heed
Must wars be waged and peoples bleed."

FATHER AND SON

To the Memory of Charles Hamilton Sorley

(1914—May)

1

My boy with the joyous, clear-eyed gaze,
Eager to face the world's rough ways
With happy heart and laughing look
As Life spreads wide its open book,
How may it be when you have trod
The long, the hard, the uphill road?
Counting the milestones I have passed,
Until the spot you'll come at last
Where now I stand: a pilgrim worn,
Illusions shattered, raiment torn,
Yet glad I've come the weary way—
Since each November led to May!

2

I almost envy you, my boy,
The bitter sweetness of the joy
I've known so well, and which awaits
In all abundance ere the Gates
At last shall close behind you. Then—?
But that lies far beyond our ken . . .

3

Meanwhile what wonders there shall be
For your admiring eyes to see,
For your inquiring soul to know,

Before the Teachers bid you go!
I fain would make your lessons mine
And further trace the great design
Whose patterns gave me such delight
As they, expanding from the night
Of Nature's endless mystery,
Have stood revealed for History.

4

A measure for those marvels vast
Which, sealed for me, shall yet at last
Show daylight-clear before your eyes,
Disclosed in all their glad surprise,
I find contained in what I've known—
And manifold the number shown
For your enchantment shall there be;
Though vain indeed were prophecy
As to their purport. Yet my fate
Has been to see such wonders great
Made plain to man as were untold
By all the records e'er unrolled
For human eyes since Time began
To shape the world for rule by Man:
The telephone, electric light,
Phonograph, wireless, human flight,
Radio-activity, x-rays,
Deep glimpses of the endless ways
That unseen constellations sound
And with electrons make the round . . .

5

To think, my boy, that you shall know,
Before the time for you to go,
Things yet more wondrous than all this!
It almost gives me eagerness—
In spite of age, in spite of pain—
To turn and fare the Road again:
This kindly world, so excellent,
As Man fulfills Divine Intent!

II.

(1915—November)

1

Dear boy, whose candid, laughing look
Shone eager for Life's open book,
Beneath the stars those once-glad eyes
Are turned unheeding to the skies
Amidst the windrows of the slain
In battle's harvest. After pain
In peace you lie. No marvels vast
Await you here. Those hopes are passed
Forever now. But on that shore
To which you've sped, are not in store
Such wonders for your soul to know
As this world's life may never know?
A kindly world, and excellent,
Where Man fulfills Divine Intent . . .?

2

The roses pass—yet roses bloom
Another year. Though in the tomb
The body lies, belovèd boy,
The pulsing life that was your joy
Its gracious tide forever pours
Throughout this world, and never lowers
Its volume while rejoicing youth
In hosts exhaustless, seeking truth
And bearing beauty, conquers earth
By thronging through the Gates of Birth,
Then pressing on with clear-eyed gaze,
Eager to brave the world's rough ways
With happy hearts and laughing looks
And read Life's endless open books.

FRIENDS AT WAR

"As God gives us to see the right."

I.

And yet, dear friend, how may we know the right?
For years we both have stood
Together, striving for the common good.
In works our faith was wrought;
United we have sought
The clarifying rays
Of God's pure light.

Now, in these troubled days,
Quite other ties of soul and heart
Have led us wide apart;
And there, where I see light,
Your eyes behold but night;
What I as evil know,
To you is right.

II.

Last night I dreamed
Before a judge we stood;
Most wise—and therefore good,
He seemed.
And taking heed
Of our perplexity
He thus decreed:

"You both are wrong, you both are right.
What each deems evil is but good
Abused, misnamed, misunderstood—
As oriental music discord is
For ears unwonted to an alien scale
Which yields seductive melodies
To them for whom your harmonies
Are dissonance; so Heaven's divinest song
Is but concordant blending
Of all you know as wrong
In balance with its opposites:
The sympathies called *right*—
Or as the sun's clear rays,
So dazzling white,
Unite conflicting hues
In perfect light."

III.

We may indeed but dimly apprehend
These cosmic meanings, at the best—
And lest our souls take fright
Before the vastness of the flight
They're bid to make,
We cling for guidance to each temporal thing
We designate as "right."
So, even though
Your right may be my wrong,
Your wrong my right,

The two, antiphonal, mated in one true song,
Wing upward to the light
Whose vibrant urgings thrill
All pregnant life
From whirling atoms up to lordly man
And inconceivably far
Beyond him, to fulfill
The Cosmic Will.
How might we mar
That perfect plan?

IV.

But now, my friend, I only know
I love you still,
Although it is your nation's will
That they whose cause is yours
In blind obedience maim and kill
The ones whose cause
I can but feel
Is just; the ones whose hearts
I know are true as steel,
Whose works and laws
Have made for order and for righteousness,
Have given them homes aglow
With happiness—
While you feel that you know
Those very things as true
Of them who wage their war for you.

v.

While hearts of millions bleed,
The heart of me is torn
With all their agony;
My soul with grief is worn
For woe that's yet to be:

Vast tragedies enacted—
Whole continents their stage;
Destruction's brutal rage;
The wrecking of a world—
The helpless peoples hurled
Into the black abyss
Where lie long ages ended;
Hurled with all the hopes
Wherewith they had ascended;
Hurled with all the bliss
Those hopes had built;
And all because—
Perverting gifts divine,
Defying Heaven's laws—
They raised a House of Greed
To guard an evil shrine.

And is it thus we must fulfill
The Cosmic Will?

WAR-POSTERS

(1915)

I.

Said the friendly attendant at the library:
"You will find in the print-room today
another war-poster—
a German one at last—just in by mail."

I had seen the collection only the day before:
English almost all of it—
(half a dozen Russian examples,
but nothing from France or Germany)—
Appeals for enlistment—stirring, pictorial—
well designed and strong in color;
the glory of war, the duty of men:

"Be a sport
and Lend a Hand to the Lads at the Front!
They want your Help!"

"Your Country has Need of You!"

A portrait of "Bobs";
before it, his sword and plumed hat
forever laid by:
"He did his Duty.
Will you do Yours?"

II.

As for the Russian cartoons:
What was their purpose?
Surely not enlistment ends;
  in Russia the young men have to serve—
  just as the Germans, the Austrians,
  the French, the Belgians,
  have to serve:
An equal duty laid upon them all.

That Russian work was primitive indeed. . .
Simply bad; that is enough to say—
  the badness of an overgrown boy
  who boasts of his bigness
  and bullies the smaller fellows.

III.

Now, as I went upstairs to the print-room,
  I conjectured as to the German poster,
  quite curious to see what it might depict.

Doubtless, I thought,
  something of blood and iron,
  breathing flame and fury—
  perhaps the "Chant of Hate"
  in picture-shape . . .
Can that be it?

Indeed, the words are German—
but—a war-poster?

Color subdued and restful,
brown and gray and green;
intimate the sentiment,
breathing love of home and peace:

A man and a woman sitting together
holding hands,
gravely happy for the moment—
He a wounded soldier
home from the front,
convalescent,
his arm in a sling—
She his young wife
(or may be his sweetheart),
a book in her other hand,
reading aloud.
And this the English of the legend:
"Hold Communion with our Thinkers and Poets;
The Book gives Joy and Consolation."

RECRUITS

"How strange that I should meet you now:
the very man that I was thinking of!"

It was my good friend, Doctor Verlyss:
now examining surgeon
at the recruiting-office for our district.

"You're an artist—just the man for me," he said.
"So come along;
I'll show you models galore!
I only fear you'll find it tantalizing
to know you cannot paint them:
'Greek gods,' 'young Apollos'—
the regulation thing to say, you know,
whenever comely, virile youths
appear in their birthday suits.
Are human beings godly only when they're stripped
and frankly show themselves just as God fashioned
them?"

"When God made man in His own image,"
I laughingly made answer,
"He left the clothing out
(most reprehensibly, of course,
according to some notions now so widely held)!

The clothing was an afterthought—
  though not of God's—
  I think the Devil must have been the tailor....
But tell me:
  how can sunlit Hellas here have bloomed anew—
  here in the North; in misty, dull-skied England?"

"So many ancient things we deemed forever passed
  have come again for us in these strange days,
  we may not be surprised at anything coming back.
We are shedding our civilization very fast just now...

"Yes, I'll show it you—
  the whole classic outfit:
  Adonises, Narcisusses, Endymions—and all the rest.
And I really want your help today," he said.
"You know anatomy so throughly—
  and my second assistant, a youthful medical student,
  has been called away to the front.
It leaves me for the moment in a hole."

I needed no more urging.

For enlistment it was a banner-day:
  in Flanders a great battle had just been fought;
  the terrible slaughter had filled us with horror,
  drenched England with sorrow,
  yet bred no dismay—

had only fired with sacrificial zeal
our British youth.

Before the door a crowd was waiting—
silently, solemnly, patiently waiting,
yet aflame with eagerness to serve;
as eager, it would seem,
to take the chances of war
as were the stakes alluring prizes in a lottery
instead of the awful likelihood
of getting killed—or infinitely worse:
maimed for life, or mutilated unspeakably:
eternities of torment
compressed to agonizing hours.

It was touching to see that throng of young men there:
so many young fellows yet in their teens
or early twenties;
carefully groomed to look their best for the crucial hour:
little personal touches in neckties and scarf-pins,
in pitch of hats and caps, in jaunty set of garments.
And so many of them, after a few days more,
never to wear civilian garb again!
So many boys of gentle blood,
fresh from happy homes:
friendly country houses, grown about with garden bloom,
full of comfort—music, books and pictures—

warm with family affection—
quiet lamplit evenings, joyous outdoor days.

II.

"Sit here at this desk," said the Doctor,
"and play for the day,
that you are my second assistant."

Undressing in the antechamber
the young fellows entered stark naked,
ushered in by a sergeant.
At first abashed, perhaps,
after a minute or two they took it as matter of course.
Standing around in a group of a dozen or so
they waited their turns to be weighed and measured
and closely examined—
the Doctor busily tapping and thumping,
listening at the chest
and carefully feeling them all over.

All unembarrassed and never self-conscious,
straying about the room and casually looking at things—
pictures on the walls, books and papers on the table—
as unconcerned and natural
as were they strolling down the street as usual
and gazing into shop windows.

Every now and then a youth
under examination at the moment
would prove so exceedingly handsome
that the Doctor made admiring exclamation:
praising the shapely build of him,
his comeliness and gracious poise,
and telling him how exceptionally high he stood
in points that made for physical excellence.
"It pleases a boy immensely
to be told such things about himself,"
the Doctor afterwards said to me.
"It seems worth while to give them happiness
when perhaps the time for joy in life
that's left to them
may not be long now."

III.

With the final group for the day
to appear for examination
came one young fellow of such surpassing quality
in figure and in feature
that the Doctor cried out:
"Just look at that boy there!
The last to come in—he's standing now
the third from the right.
Of all the recruits I have ever examined
from the very beginning down to this moment
unquestionably he is the finest yet."

"I well can believe you," I answered.
"Truly it would seem that he even might be
the young god Hermes incarnate here before us—
as beautiful to look upon as the statue by Praxi-
tiles."

I noted the name when he gave it
and the usual facts were written against it:
Adelbert Enderman—
and I wondered who the splendid youth might be.
"You hold the record," the Doctor told him
when he had been examined:
"Of all recruits accepted here since the War began
(and many's the first-class specimen of English
manhood
stands to the credit of this station)
there's no one yet can anywhere near approach you.
If there be such a thing as absolute perfection
in the human figure
I think no other English lad alive
can be so close to it as you are.
My friend here is a well known painter,
and he, I'm sure, will bear out what I tell you."

"Indeed I will," I heartily agreed.
"And I only wish I had the privilege
of painting your likeness—
portraying you just as you stand
for that would be the only way
my brush could do justice to the subject."

The youth's clear eyes lit up;
but in their limpid glow
and in the rare boy smile that came with it
no trace of vanity was visible.
Rather it seemed the pleasure shown by one
who bears a gift
and from the receiver learns its precious worth.

He flushed and said:
"I am glad, I am glad as I can be
to hear you tell me that.
I am glad because, if that which I am giving
has all the worth you say it has,
it still could never be too much
for me to give for England."

IV.

That evening at the club,
thinking over the day's experience
I said to myself:
"If any moral difference there be
between these days of ours
and those of ancient times and human sacrifice
may it not lie in favor of antiquity?
How would we weigh in the balance—
we, who offer up
to our gods of Self Will, Vainglory and Greed
the choicest blood of our peoples,
numbering by millions our victims?"

Musing on this for a while,
I picked up a London weekly
and idly glanced at its contents.
My eye caught the name, *Adelbert Enderman.*
It was signed to these verses:

ANTINOUS

"He sacrificed himself to destiny"

In the flower of my youth
I stand at the brink of the river.
The Voice of the Nile
Is calling me.
My star, now gleaming above me,
This night will sink to the river.

My youth in its flower! . . .
And I stand at the brink of dark waters.
The eager waves
Are clamoring to embrace me.
They call me to sink in dark waters
To depths ever tranquil.

In the flower of my youth,
In the bloom of my beauty,
I go rose-garlanded.

THE RETURNING

We long for her, we yearn for her—
Yes, ardently we yearn
For her return.

Recalling those beloved days
(Days intimate with ways
Of friends so near to us
And life so dear to us)
We yearn unspeakably for her return.

And come she must...Yet while we trust
We soon may see the passing of this agony
Which makes intrusive years still seem
A fearsome dream,
We know that when she comes
She really comes not back again.

She'll come in other guise
And under fairer skies—
And yet to bitter pain!

That day she went away
Our homes with laughing youth were filled;
Where then was happiness
Is now distress;
For when she left
Youth followed her—
We stay bereft.

So all our golden joy
For what she brings
Must carry gray alloy:
The sorrow that she cannot lay,
The misery she cannot stay—
While all the gladsome songs she sings
Must bear for undertones
Old sighs and echoed moans.

As they who go away
In flush of youth
May come quite worn and gray
And bringing naught but ruth,—
So, when the strife shall cease,
And when she comes at last,
When all the armies vast
Shall at her feet
Kneel down to greet
Thrice-welcome Peace,
This world will be so changed
(So many dear ones dead,
So many friends estranged,
So many blessings fled,
So many wonted ways forever barred,
So many coming days forever marred)
That then
She truly comes not back again—
She, the Peace we knew.

Yet how we long for her—
How ardently we yearn
For her return!

GOOD-WILL AND GOD'S PEACE

I.

O Ruler of Nations and Master of All!
Thy will be our own as on earth it is done!
Protect us, we pray Thee, from victories won
in warfare for wrong!
And in jubilant song may our paeans ne'er sound
for warriors crowned
With laurels ill gained—our honor bestained
by exalting our might
And abusing Thy bounty in scorn of the Right!

II.

O Ruler of Nations and Master of All!
We long for the Peace and Good-Will on Earth
Proclaimed by Thine angels when hailing the birth
of our Saviour and Lord—
Who instead brought a sword: Thy token that strife
shall dominate Life
Until Peace has been gained and Good-Will attained
with our passing from Night
Out of bloodshed and woe, unto joy in Thy Light.

III.

O Ruler of Nations and Master of All!
Now teach us, Thy peoples, that nowhere on earth

The Peace we all long for can ever hold worth
till Thy boon of Good-Will
We accept; that until to achieve it we yearn
Thy Faith we shall spurn!
So our infinite need is a mutual heed
for the weal and the right
Of Each and of All on our way to the Light.

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